

After 46 years fostering, Laurant family keeps going

Ruth and Nathaniel Laurant have been fostering children for 46 years, and are still going strong. Fostering has truly been a life-long passion for this amazing couple. During 50 years of marriage, they adopted and raised four kids and have been blessed with nine grandchildren. They are currently in the process of adopting their fifth child.

Because the Laurents' home was built on a stable foundation of patience and love, over the years they have also opened their doors to adult grandchildren who

needed a temporary place to call home.

Nathaniel spends his days around children, working in the maintenance department for East Aurora High School. Ruth is a full time homemaker. She says that caretaking came naturally to her. Their career in foster care grew out of this interest, starting with an initially informal relationship. Just a short time into their marriage Ruth agreed to help a friend. She and Nathaniel took the friend's young daughters when she could not care for them anymore. The Laurants ended up raising those girls, and from that day forward they never stopped taking children into their home if there was no one to care for them. The Laurants have seen many foster children pass through their doors over the years.

"Too many kids, and too many years to count," says Ruth, "What matters is that you give them love and treat them well. All you can hope for is that they will give it back."

Ruth and Nathaniel saw early on that education was important, and they quickly made that the number one goal in helping kids in their care. Seeing that their own

kids got through school was no small achievement. She and Nathaniel presented a united front when it came to school. One result that makes them especially proud is that one of their sons went on to graduate from college.

Given the Laurants' years of experience, one might expect to be wowed by some secret to their success in raising so many children. Instead, enlightenment comes by way of a humble couple, who obviously did not sweat the small stuff.

"Whenever a child comes into my home, I treat them with respect. If they do the same, and they go to school, they can stay as long as they want," was Ruth's advice to approaching foster youth.

While that may seem simple, the Laurants know how difficult it can be to implement. The one thing that was most difficult to bear was to watch "kids of in and out of foster homes." That is why Ruth decided early on to keep her expectations simple, and hold on to them as long as she could. For 46 years, their dedication to providing a safe and loving home for kids who might otherwise not have one has held firm.

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Preparing for camp opportunities in the Northern Region

There are procedures within Northern Region to fund camps on a case-by-case basis. If a foster parent whose license is supervised by DCFS is aware of a summer camp opportunity for a child in foster care, he or she should provide the caseworker with basic information such as location, duration, and cost. The worker can request payment for the camp, following DCFS procedures. Eligible payments may be approved locally. In some instances, it may be necessary to prove that there are no other resources available for payment, i.e. scholarships or individual grants. Foster parents should be prepared with documentation, if requested.

Children and foster parents served by private agencies can also request payment for camps through their respective caseworkers. Each agency may have its own set of criteria for determining eligibility and/or payment.

Following are two examples of camp opportunities for youth. Caseworkers, other foster parents, schools, park districts and church groups are all sources for ideas and information about specific camps.

Camp Maple Leaf

Camp Maple Leaf, run by DeKalb/Sycamore Association of Special Recreation, may be a day camp option for families in the DeKalb,

Sycamore and Genoa communities. The weekday camp starts on June 18 and runs through August 9. It is a half-day program that goes from 8:45a.m. until 12:45 p.m. The camp can accommodate children with, and without disabilities. The child to counselor ratio is smaller for kids with special needs and can include aids for children with that need. The camp is prepared to work with youth from DCFS and is willing to work with DCFS regarding billing. Contact Suzie Zeeh at 815-758-6663 x122. Caregivers should discuss possible billing assistance with the child's caseworker.

Spectrum Wilderness Program

This program is actually located in the southern part of the state in Carbondale; however it is available to all youth from DCFS ages 13-18 years. The Spectrum Wilderness Program is a 30-day program designed to teach teens good decision-making skills by getting down to basic survival skills. Teens will be on a supervised camping adventure that includes physical endurance, making their own meals, setting up and taking down their own tents, and learning about teamwork.

This program is based out of Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, and it has had tremendous success with helping teens learn basic life, and coping skills. Spectrum is designed to

help youth deal directly with behaviors related to self-concept, accountability, mutual responsibility, and trust and respect. It is often considered a "therapeutic" intervention for youth who have difficulties in school, community or traditional placement. However, for adolescents who enjoy the outdoors or personal challenge, the program also presents a unique opportunity for continued growth and improved self-esteem.

Contact the teen's caseworker for billing information and help with the referral. Questions about the camp program can be directed to Geoff Schroop at 618-453-1122 x 239. Web site information: www.dce.siu.edu/ton.

Northern News

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Local programs spot development delays

Child and Family Connections (CFC) is part of the Illinois Department of Human Services. It is responsible for both identifying children under three with special needs or developmental concerns, and referring these children and their families to the most appropriate service providers. There is a list of many milestones or expectations that a child should have achieved according to his or her age. If a child misses a developmental target, it could be a sign of a delay or other concern. The key to helping any child reach his full potential is to detect and address any problems as early as possible.

Last year, DCFS concentrated efforts to make sure that all young children in care received developmental screenings. Children entering care for the first time under the Integrated Assessment Program received these important screenings as part of their assessment. Even after an initial screening, foster parents caring for children five years old or younger should continue to be watchful. Caregivers who later suspect that a child is exhibiting signs of a developmental delay should discuss their concerns with the child's caseworker. It is possible to request another evaluation through the local Child and Family Connection (CFC) provider. After age two and a half, children receive assessments through their local school district.

There are six CFC offices located throughout the Northern Region.

The program also maintains a general toll-free number 888-329-0633 for more information.

CFC Access Services of Illinois

4048 East State Street
Rockford, IL 60118
800-921-0094 Toll Free
Boone, Bureau, Marshall, Ogle,
Putnam, and Winnebago counties

CFC Lake County Health Department

2424 Washington St., Suite 210
Waukegan, IL 60085
888-539-3033 Toll Free
Lake county

CFC Regional Office of Education

206 South Galena, Suite 40
Freeport, IL 60132
888-297-1041 Toll Free
Carroll, DeKalb, Jo Daviess, Lee,
Stephenson, and Whiteside counties

CFC Kane Kendall Service Coordinators

179 Oswalt St.
Batavia, IL 60510
888-282-0997 Toll Free
Kane and Kendall counties

CFC Options & Advocacy for McHenry Co.

333 Commerce Drive, Suite 800
Crystal Lake, IL 60014
888-376-8828 Toll Free
McHenry county

CFC DuPage

555 East Butterfield Rd.
Lombard, IL 60148
630-493-0400
DuPage County

Fresh new format for Foster Parent Advisory Council

The Northern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council has launched a rotating schedule to increase participation across the region. Monthly meetings will rotate between DeKalb, Joliet and Rockford field offices. Each fourth meeting will be a full meeting at the Aurora regional office.

"In addition to the standing business with updates and issues, we will have a presentation that will be the same at each of the local meetings," explained council co-chairperson Robyn Harvey. "Then we can have broader discussion and joint decisions at the full meeting in Aurora."

The cycle started in January in DeKalb with a discussion on the "Myths of Reunification." That was the topic for February in Joliet and March in Rockford. Then in April, at the Aurora Regional Office, Bernadette McCarthy of the DCFS Clinical Division will deliver a presentation on the Department's reunification initiative.

"This way we can bring the meetings to more convenient locations and more families can be involved," said co-chair Debbie Freke.

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month and are open to all caregivers with DCFS and private agencies. Meetings begin at 6 p.m. with a light supper. For more information contact Robyn Harvey at 815-986-8672.

Northern Region Training Calendar

On-line training to prepare for Child and Family Team Meetings

The DCFS Office of Training has blended technology with training to offer the first on-line course for foster parents, "Child and Family Team Meetings for Foster Caregivers." Foster parents can earn three hours of training credits as they learn about the role caregivers play during the meetings as one of the team members working toward reunification and other permanency options.

Foster parents can take this course using a computer in their home. An instructor will open the course and remain available through the end of the class while participants work through the course from home. Foster parents without computers at home or with dial-up connections can choose to attend one of two on-site sessions at DCFS computer labs.

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| Monday, April 16 | 6:15 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. |
| Thursday, April 26 | 6:15 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. |
| Wednesday, May 9 | 6:15 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. |
| Saturday, May 19 | 12:45 p.m. – 4 p.m. |
| Monday, May 21 | 8:45 a.m. – Noon |
| Friday, June 1 | 6:15 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. |
| Tuesday, June 5* (Computer LAB Class, DCFS, 6201 So. Emerald Chicago) | 12:45 p.m. – 4 p.m. |
| Tuesday, June 12* (Computer LAB Class, DCFS, 227 So. 7 th Springfield) | 12:45 p.m. – 4 p.m. |
| Saturday, June 23 | 8:45 a.m. – Noon |

To register for the foster parent on-line training, caregivers may contact the DCFS registration unit at 877-800-3393.

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

College of DuPage Area 630-942-2903

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| Aurora | Comfort Suites City Ctr. |
| June 2 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. |
| Elgin | Judson College |
| April 14 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. |
| Glen Ellyn | College of DuPage |
| April 21 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. |
| June 9 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. |
| Kankakee | Kankakee Comm. College |
| April 21 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. |
| Romeoville | Comfort Inn |
| June 9 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. |
| Waukegan | Waukegan Comm. Church |
| April 28 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. |
| Waukegan | Ramada Inn |
| June 16 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. |

Rock Valley College Area 915-921-2010

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| Rockford | Stenstrom Center |
| April 21 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-4 p.m. |
| May 19 (Sat) | 9 a.m.-4 p.m. |